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Henry Tompkins
Lion Tamer





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TONY TOMPKINS

THE LION TAMER





TONY TOMPKINS

THE LION TAMER

BY
HARRIETT SCOTT BARBER

WITH REMARQUE ILLUSTRATIONS BY
CLYDE J. NEWMAN

"WHOM THE GODS LOVE DIE YOUNG"



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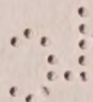
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BY JOHN HENRY



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TONY
TOMPKINS
THE LION
TAMER

HEN Anthony

Tompkins dis-
carded dresses

and people had an opportunity
to view his contour to ad-
vantage, it was universally
conceded that his head was
too big for his slender body
and his tiny legs.

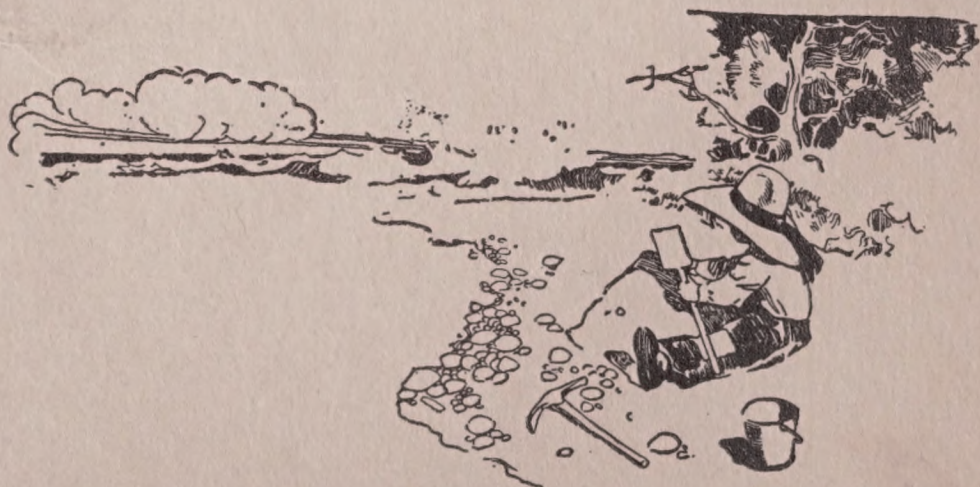
The Tompkins family had

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a wholesome dread of prodigies. Therefore, that it might not be said of Anthony Tompkins that he read Greek at four years of age, he was early sent away to a nook of the world where Greek had not yet penetrated, but where the waves sometimes whispered and oft-times roared a language of their own. He soon learned to laugh at their queer pranks, and found it possible to make

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wonderful things in the sand. But best of all, he found a mud-hole quite out of reach of the tide. When the latter came, in a domineering way, and drove him from the beach, he willingly betook himself to the woods, where, fascinating in the slipperiness of its contents, was the mud-hole, never too wet nor too dry, but always cool and slimy, and a delight to his little toes.



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It was after his first visit to the mud-hole, that he enjoyed his first satisfactory bath. Hitherto, the water had always looked as clean after this event as before, but on that long-to-be-remembered day, when he emerged from the bath, the water was black, the tub was black, and Anthony Tompkins then and there conceived a new ambition in life. The nurse first protested, but at

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last yielded, because the Tompkins family so decreed. Gradually his knees became hopelessly grimy. As the summer progressed, he acquired upon his left foot a much cherished scar. Of course, he cried when the doctor removed the glass, but he never regretted stepping on the broken bottle, because that scar was the envy of all the other little boys.

As one acquires, so must



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one lose; thus Anthony Tompkins lost the dignity of his name and became "Tony Tompkins" and "a fine kid," as somebody expressed it.

Two seasons of such wholesome enjoyment so developed his muscles that the Tompkins family agreed that Tony, the once dreaded prodigy, might return to his own, to be assisted in the dissipation of his soul-consuming desire to become a

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prize-fighter. The beach had ceased to be of interest to him because he could "lick" all the boys of his size, and for reasons well known to himself, he wouldn't hit a "bigger" boy any more than he would a "littler" one. So it was that he greeted the news of his departure with the wildest enthusiasm. He did not know that some one had once wept for other worlds to conquer, but

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the spirit of the deprivation was strong upon him, when the news set him dancing with delight.

When the Tompkins family decided to emancipate themselves from a tyrannical landlord and build a house of their own, the youngest member of the family was not consulted. So Tony's home coming was full of surprises. From the moment he stepped off the

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train and into a diminutive cart, drawn by a pony more diminutive, until every nook of his new domain was explored, it was like a fairy tale, and best of all, he was the prince.

It was the wall paper in the nursery that served as a magic wand and transformed Tony Tompkins, alias "Prize-fighter," alias, "Prince," into "Tony Tompkins, The Lion Tamer."

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When the sunshine came through the wide windows to kiss the somethings on the wall, those somethings were just plain conventional fleur-de-lis, deeply shaded at the middle and crowned with a still more conventional decoration that curled in and out in a mysterious fashion. But when twilight came—behold the transformation:—the fleur-de-lis became lions' heads, the deeply shaded

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centers, angry mouths, and the curling top decorations, bushy manes.

At first it did not seem possible to Tony Tompkins that others did not realize how brave he was to sleep in a den of lions, but then others seemed so utterly blind as not to understand at all. Hence, he silently bore the honor of being The Greatest Lion Tamer on Earth, but had the Tomp-

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kins family found time to notice, they would have discovered that he carried his head a little higher than usual and that his was a world of his own.

Of course it was comforting to enter the nursery arrayed in a red flannel shirt and carrying a tiny whip. Proudly he would advance to the center of the room and bow to the imaginary crowd, but he

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disdained applause from said crowd until his work was ended and he bowed himself out, quite as red as his shirt, but radiant with success. Once more he had escaped with his life.

But, after all, there was little pleasure in being The Greatest Lion Tamer on Earth, as no one knew anything about it, and as Tony Tompkins sat down by the dog-house one

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bright morning the sun failed to warm his heart toward the cold and unappreciative world. He was considering the advisability of letting the lions eat him. Then, he thought, perhaps they would understand. A most dramatic situation was forming itself in his mind when a sound came to him from the other side of the dog-house.

“Darn it,” said a tiny voice, in an undertone.

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Tony Tompkins stood on two boxes and peeped over the dog-house at the owner of the voice. There sat a little red-headed boy, trying to train a Guinea pig. Every one knows, and, of course, so did Tony Tompkins, that a Guinea pig is the most senseless pet in the world, and soon his disgust became audible.

“Nothing but a Guinea pig,” he said, impulsively, “Gee!



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you should see my lions."

When Tony Tompkins realized he had told of his possessions, he was so frightened that he clung to the top of the dog-house to keep from falling. A moment more and he decided to act like a man. Once off of the boxes, he thrust his hands into his pockets and sauntered to the other side of the dog-house.

"Say, now," he drawled,

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“who are you, anyway?”

“Oh, I’m Jimmy,” answered the little boy. “My mother is housekeeper next door.”

“Well,” said the other, “I’m Tony Tompkins, ‘The Greatest Lion Tamer on Earth.’”

The effect produced upon Jimmy was all that could have been desired, and Tony soon unburdened himself to his appreciative listener.

“How many have you

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got?" questioned Jimmy.

"About a million, I guess," said Tony, nonchalantly.

"Where do you keep 'em when you aint training 'em?"

Tony Tompkins reflected a moment, and then drew very close to Jimmy.

"See here," he said, "you cross your heart, hope to die, and I'll tell you all about 'em."

Jimmy crossed his heart and hoped to die. Then the two

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boys sat down with their backs against the dog-house. Presently a greyhound came out, looked at the Guinea pig in a disinterested way, and then lay down close to Tony Tompkins' outstretched legs, as if he, too, yearned to hear about lions.

"See that room with the big windows?" asked Tony, "well, that's where I tame 'em."

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“And when you ain’t taming?” persisted Jimmie.

“Oh then,” replied Tony, without hesitation, “I send ’em through a tunnel to Spain.”

“My!” gasped Jimmie, and the Guinea pig was all forgotten.

They sat quietly for a while, and then he asked, as a blush covered his little face,

“What is Spain?”

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Tony Tompkins rose and walked back and forth for a few minutes, much to Jimmie's discomfiture. Apparently the Lion Tamer was lost in meditation. Suddenly he turned and inquired,

"Say, how old are you?"

"Five," came the reply.

"Most too little to know, I guess," said Tony, and with a look of disdain he strode down the lawn, followed by

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the faithful old greyhound.

Jimmie Owens was a very little boy even for five years of age, but perhaps it was because those five years had not been of the brightest. When a baby he was taught to restrain his laughter because it annoyed the cross old maid for whom his mother kept house. It may do very well for a society girl to smile with her eyes, but when a

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little chap of five does so it is strangely pathetic; and Jimmie Owens was most pathetic in all things. His made-over garments were pathetic, his pale little face also, and most pathetic of all was his devotion to the inappreciative little Guinea pig.

The week following his meeting with Tony Tompkins was rainy and dismal, but if he had been an attentive

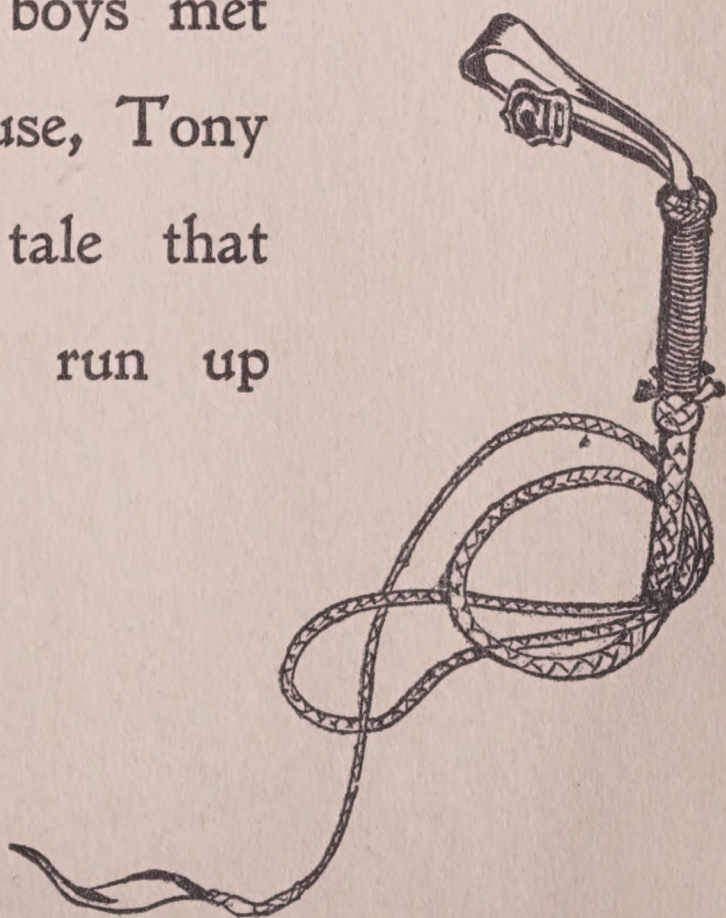
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listener, so also was he an ardent admirer. Next to conversing with the object of his admiration was the privilege of sitting at his own little window and gazing up at the room where Tony Tompkins performed his wonderful feats. Once, through the rain, he caught a glimpse of the red flannel shirt and saw Tony Tompkins flourish his whip. And 'though the world

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was cheerless without, Jimmie Owens' little heart throbbed with a new warmth. He was in possession of his first secret. A perfectly splendid one, and it was about The Greatest Lion Tamer on Earth.

When at last the sun shone and the little boys met again by the dog-house, Tony Tompkins told a tale that made little quivers run up



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and down Jimmie's spine. It was concerning the way in which lion tamers usually die.

"Yes," remarked Tony, "sometimes the lions bite their heads off, and sometimes they chase 'em to death."

"Oh," said Jimmie, "and aren't you afraid?"

"Me?—well I guess not," answered Tony, "just wouldn't I make a fine lion tamer if I was?"

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Whatever else Tony Tompkins had in his mind to tell was left untold, for just then somebody, (Jimmie didn't know who), came out and told The Lion Tamer he was wicked to sit on the damp ground when he had such a cold. Jimmie wondered at this unknown person's audacity as he sat and watched his hero marched into the house in a most humiliating fashion.

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The rest of the morning Tony sat by the open fire and toasted his slippers. At first he rebelled against being kept indoors, but as the day wore on his head hurt so, and he was so unhappy that he willingly lay upon the big leather lounge. When the tall afternoon shadows made the comfortable sitting room a gloomy place for a little boy with only his own unhappy

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thoughts to keep him company, his sister came and read to him. Tony Tompkin's library consisted of just ten books. His sister chose the first she happened to find. The cover was most inviting, but the contents burned into Tony's little soul. It was a Sunday School book. Often it had been read to him, but to-day it had a new meaning. It was about a little boy who told

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lies. Tony was most uncomfortable as he remembered about the tunnel and Spain.

He wished he had not met Jimmie Owens. But when night came and he was carried up to the nursery, his conscience became the least of his troubles, for there were the great gaping mouths, the red flannel shirt and the whip.

The next day, and many more, the family physician

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came, but once when Tony looked up to see the old gentlemen's kindly face, he saw instead a young woman. She was dressed all in white, had merry brown eyes, and wore a medal pinned to her collar.

"I'm going to make you very comfortable," she said.

Tony forgot the pain in his head. He liked her voice and her hair, but best of all he did like the medal. He



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wondered if she won it for fighting. Once he tried to ask, and to let her know that he was once a prize fighter. But his throat pained too much, so he just lay wondering and admiring, until he forgot all about the medal and learned to love her.

It was she who rescued him when the lions tried to choke him. Sometimes he would float away to a land of beauti-

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ful flowers, where everything was too wonderful to understand; but when he least expected the lions would rush upon him in a wild attempt to choke him. Then it was she who would raise him in her arms, that he might breathe more easily, whispering meantime soothing words—words that he could not understand—at such times it was a comfort to know he was

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not left alone in his peril.

Tony Tompkins and the nurse were practically isolated, and the family moved quietly below stairs, for as the coachman had told Jimmie, when that little body found courage to ask about his friend, the disease was "most catchin'."

Dreary, dreary days they were, and many many times the little woman up stairs forgot for a moment she was a

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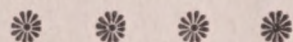
trained nurse, and sat upon the top step, her head in her hands, and moaned,

“Our Lord knows best, but he is such a blessed little fellow.”

At last came the final struggle. An emaciated little hand grasped an imaginary whip, but all too late. When the sunbeams came in to kiss the fleur-de-lis they lingered about the form of a little boy that

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lay quite still in a young woman's arms.



Jimmie Owens saw the windows of Tony's room thrown open. Instinctively he experienced an unknown dread. Cautiously he drew near the door of the big house. A sad faced man came out. It was Tony's father. He looked old-

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er than when Jimmie had last seen him, and there was a something about him that gave the little boy courage to approach.

Gently he touched the man's coat. The man seemed startled at the sight of the little boy, but at length he placed his big hand upon his tousled red head and said something that nobody but Jimmie and the stately greyhound heard. A



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moment more and Jimmie was back to where the senseless Guinea pig lay. Throwing himself upon the ground and gathering his Guinea pig in his arms, he wailed as only a boy of five can wail, and what the unsympathetic Guinea pig heard was:

“Tony Tompkins, The Greatest Lion Tamer on Earth, is dead.”



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